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ABSTRACT

This study involved observation of 4- and 5-year-olds in a day care setting, focusing on how they developed and maintained friendships with other children in day care. Children were observed twice a day for 3 weeks as they engaged in outdoor play, dramatic play, and manipulative play. Observations included which children played with each other and who initiated the play. Findings revealed that children often changed play partners and activities, and that they often played with different peers outside and inside the classroom. A survey of parents also indicated that most children talked with their family members about what their peers from day care did in school. (EV)

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Samantha Amiker

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Friendships Among 4 & 5 year olds in Day Care

Abstract

While observing 17, 4 & 5 yr old children I noticed how they developed and maintained friendships in the day care setting. I observed them twice a day for 3 weeks as they engaged in 3 different kinds of play namely, outdoor play, dramatic play and manipulative play. I also paid close attention to whom they played with, and who initiated the play.

I also designed a survey for the children's parents to answer, focusing on the children's discussions about their peers while they are at home.

Introduction

Friendships come about naturally when one child is drawn to another particular child that he/she meets. Friendships don't just provide children with a playmate, but also give them a companion, someone that "they can share concerns, interests, and information and secrets with". (Kopp & Krakow, 1982, p. 540) In addition, friendships are very influential on a child's social development. As Devries and Zan explained, "children's attachments are important to them," and are a visible sign of a gradual betterment in their "social development." (Devries & Zan, 1994, p. 61)

Concepts of Friendship

What is the meaning of friendship? According to Anselmo, "friends are defined as people who spontaneously seek each other's company without social pressure to do so." (1987, p. 319) However, friendship has a different

meaning for children of different ages. According to Selman's Stages of Friendship Development, "the meaning of friendship is not (always) the same." (1981, p. 542) Selman suggests children under the age of six years old be at level one and the characteristics of "friendship are based on physical or geographic factors. Children are self-centered, with no understanding of the perspectives of others." (Selman, 1981, p. 542) In other words, a child who is under the age of six considers a friend to be a child that lives in his/her neighborhood, attends the same school (or and in the same classroom), and who may have toys that are desirable and to their liking. In addition, children at this age are still in the self-centered stage, their awareness of another child's feelings is very limited. According to Devries and Zan children in early childhood "are still constructing their feelings, ideas, and values concerning friendship." (1994, p. 60)

Resemblance Between Friends

Children often form friendships with children who reflect themselves; not their physical appearance of a child, but the common interests they may share. Which may be reflect their age, and gender, suggest that the "two attributes most extensively shared by friends are age and gender." This is visible when one enters a classroom with a set age level. "The age relation is

modest within classrooms, owing to the small age range in most of them (about 12 months)." (Kopp & Krakow, 1982, p. 542)

Children in early childhood usually make friends with a child that is the same gender as them. Mixed sex "best friends are rare." (Kopp & Krakow, 1982, p. 542) Boys usually prefer to play with boys and girls usually prefer to play with girls. According to Dweck, "segregation of boys and girls begins at the start of the early school years..." (1981, p. 322)

Girls usually play in "small groups," and in "small spaces" within these small groups and spaces, they make changes to "social rules and roles." (Anselmo, 1987, p. 322) They spend most of their time playing games that are considered in society as girl's games, "traditional girl's games such as {house and school}." Engaging in such activities, allow them to take on other roles such as pretending to be the mother, teacher and or other people they are familiar with. It also allows them to make-up their own rules. Engaging in such play, "they learn about close personal relationships." (Anselmo, 1987, p. 322)

On the other hand, boys usually play in larger-groups. Their games are more physical and wide range. Boys usually like to play where there is a lot of space to move around. For example, the outdoor space allows them to play most of their action games that involves a lot of movement such as jumping, running, wrestling...etc. "Boys games tend to have explicit rules

which move them toward defined goals." (Anselmo, 1987, p. 322) For example, when children are playing tag, they usually designate an object that is considered base. Base is looked upon as a safe place and no one is able to tag you when you are touching the base. Children often consider their teachers or parents to be base too. "Boys experiences lead them to learn about elaboration of rules." (Anselmo, 1987, p.322.)

Functions of Friendship

What are the benefits of friendships? Friendships has a special purpose, it provides children with a companion, but not just any companion. The companion would be someone that was especially picked by that child. Friendship also provides children with a companion, whom they spend most of their time with, either in shared play, talking, and/or in structured activities.

Within the friendship, you may have one child that is dominant, the controller, while the other child may be submissive, to commit to the decision of another. For example, one child likes to pretend to be the teacher when playing school, he/she tells the other children what to do, how to do it and when to do it. On the other hand, one child might be the submissive friend; he/she listens to and does whatever the other children tell him /her to do. One

friend may use the other as a model, while the other friend may enjoy "teaching". (Craig & Baucum, 2001, p. 370)

As children grow older, "their interest in having friends increases" (Selman, 1981, p. 369) In addition, their pattern of friendships changes. For instance, with children under the age of six, their friendships are "primarily based on physical or geographic factors." (Selman, 1981, p. 369) On the other hand, children over the age of six, "their friendships begin to be based on reciprocity and awareness of other's feelings." (Selman, 1981, p. 369)

"A friend is a friend, regardless of age, but the meaning of friendship is not the same." (Kopp & Krakow, 1982, p. 542) Friendship has a different meaning for a child that is under the age of six years old. In their minds a friend is a person that lives in their neighborhood or very close to them, attends the same school as they do and a friend is someone that they see daily. Friendship is a natural thing for children; they are usually drawn to a particular child that they meet.

Since children usually meet their friends in school, it makes sense that one of the "two attributes most extensively shared by friends {is their} age." (Kopp & Krakow, 1982, p. 542) The other attribute is their gender; boys and girls usually segregate at an early year. Boys usually play with boys and they play in larger-groups. In addition their activities are more physical and wide

range then girls. On the other hand, girls usually play with girls and in small groups and spaces.

Friendship doesn't just provide children with a playmate, but with a companion. This is the person that they tell their secrets to, play with most of the time and enjoy having around. Even though, "expectations about friends are not well formulated by young children," they are able to express their feelings and understanding about friendship in their own ways. (Kopp & Krakow, 1982, p. 544)

Observation of children

I observed all the children in my classroom twice a day for 3 weeks. I observed them once in the morning and again in the afternoon on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for at least 30 minutes. I observed whom they played with, different kinds of play they participated in and who initiated the play.

With whom they played

While observing all the in play, I noticed that certain children engaged in play together. The following children all engaged in group play with each other: group 1: Natasha, Zoĕ, Liza, Amanda, Ana, and Lisa; group

2: Hilary, Stephanie, Eric, and Kim; group 3: Mike, Michael, Samuel, John, and Carlos. Betty played by herself and Ryan worked on the computer.

During my observation I noticed that some of the children changed whom they played with. For instance, Natasha was playing with Zoĕ, Liza, Amanda, Ana and Lisa; then she started to play with Hilary, Stephanie, Kim and Eric, after awhile she moved to another area and started to play by herself. After playing alone for awhile, she went back to Amanda and Zoĕ and asked them to play with her.

Michael also changed whom he played with. First he was playing with Mike, Samuel, John, and Carlos; then he engaged in play with Liza and Lisa. He continued to play with these two girls for the remainder of playtime.

<u>Types of play</u>

I observed the children in relation to the following types of play, dramatic play, manipulative play, and outdoor play. The following children participated in play in the dramatic area, Natasha, Zoĕ, Liza, Amanda, Lisa, and Ana. The following is what I observed in this area:

Zoĕ and Natasha are walking around in the dramatic area with forks in their hands. Liza takes a bowl and a cup and places them on the ironing board. Lisa is setting on the floor next to the vanity looking through the dress-up box. Liza says to Natasha, "Lets play house. Get the plates for me." Natasha hands her the plates. Zoĕ says, "You need to give me the plates. Somebody has to get the food." Natasha takes the eggs from Zoĕ and Zoĕ says, "No, you need to put it like this." Zoĕ puts the eggs

onto a red plate. Liza tells Natasha, "Give me one of your spoons and I'll give you my fork." Natasha says, " No." Amanda is on her knees taking out the plates and pots from the cupboard. Zoĕ says, "Who wants cake?" Zoĕ is trying to take the plates from Amanda. Ana is sitting at the table holding the stuffed animal {Curious George} She takes the spoon and places it to his mouth and says, "Eat your food baby."

Liza, Ana, and Lisa engaged in play in the dramatic area for the entire playtime. Where as Natasha, Amanda, and Zoĕ extended their play to other areas. For example, Natasha left the dramatic area and engaged in play in the block area. The following is what I observed.

Natasha takes all the food that she was playing with and places them back into the cupboard. She walks over to the block area; where Stephanie, Kim, Hilary and Eric are playing. Natasha says to Kim, " Give me the big blocks." (Pointing to the rectangular blocks) Natasha is walking over to Hilary and says, "Do you want to play with me?' Hilary says, "Let's build a City."

<u>Manipulative Play</u>

The second type of play that I observed the children in was manipulative play. Michael, Mike, John, Samuel, and Carlos played in this area. I noticed that there was a lot of movement in this area and creative play as well. The following is what I observed.

Michael is in the manipulative area, he says, " Hey, guys lets make robots." Mike, Samuel, John and Carlos run over to where Michael is and start to take out two buckets of manipulative toys. All the boys start to grab for the toys and Michael says, " Lets make Power Ranger robots?" John holds up his robot and shouts, "Look Mike, I made a Power Ranger robot." Mike says, " Wow, that's cool. Can you make me one?" John takes the toys and starts to make another robot. Mike takes his robot and walks around the room saying, "John you can't get me." John gets up and walks quickly towards Mike and says, "I got you." (The boys started to laugh.) Samuel yells to John and Mike, "Wait for me guys. Come on Carlos let's play robot." Michael says, "What about me? I'm not your friend." Samuel says, "So, that's why you're a baby cry. Come on guys lets play somewhere else." Carlos says, " Let's play with the dinosaurs?" Samuel, Mike and John walk over to Carlos and grab a dinosaur and pretend to wrestle. Samuel says, " My dinosaur is the Rock."(That's a wrestler from World Wide Federation) Samuel says, "Here comes the people's elbow." And slams the dinosaur on top of Michael's dinosaur.

Michael changed whom he initially engaged in play with (Mike, John, Samuel, and Carlos) and started to play with Liza and Lisa in the dramatic area. The following is what I observed.

Michael enters the dramatic area. He walks toward the stove and grabs a spoon, now he's walking towards the stove. He puts a pot on the stove and pretends

to cook. Liza hands him an egg and says, "Here take it. Come on Michael." They're walking to the table and Liza places the eggs on the plates. She turns to Michael and says, "Put one here." (Pointing to the cups.) One egg falls onto the floor, Liza looks at the egg and turns and looks at Michael with her mouth opened wide. "Oh, we have to cook again, Michael we have to cook again, because the egg fell on the floor." Liza and Michael walk back to the stove and pretend to cook the egg again.

Out door play

The last kind of play in which I observed the children was outdoor play. I noticed when the children were outside they all played together. Children that didn't engaged in play with certain of their peers inside the classroom were now playing with one another. Here is what I observed when the children went outside to play.

All of the children are running to the fence and Hilary says, "Samuel you're the monster. Come and get us." Samuel says, "I don't want to be the monster no more." All the children starts to call his name "Samuel, Samuel, Samuel..." As Samuel run towards them, they all run laughing and saying, 'Get me." Samuel chases the other children for awhile then he says, "I don't want to play no more." Samuel walks over to the fence and sits down. (The other children started to play in small groups.) Hilary and Natasha are playing on the seesaw; John, Kim, and Lisa are riding the tricycles; Michael, Mike, Samuel, and Carlos are chasing one another and the other children are climbing and jumping off of the house. Ana walks over to Hilary and Natasha and says, "Let's play duck-duck goose." When the other

children see them playing they all join in. After they finished playing duck-duck-goose, Ana says, " Lets play London Bridge."

Who initiated the play?

During my 3 weeks of observations, I noticed that there were a few children who initiated play. The following is a list of the children who initiated play:

Initiator	Area	What they said?
1. Carlos	Manipulative	"Let's play with the dinosaurs."
2. Michael	Manipulative	" Hey, Guys let's make robots."
3. Ana	Outdoor	"Let's play duck-duck goose."
4. Samuel	Manipulative	" Let's play somewhere else."
5. Liza	Dramatic	" Let's play house"
6. Hilary	Outdoor	"Come get us."
7. Natasha	Block	"Do you want to play with me?"

What I learned

During my observation of Friendships Among 4 & 5 yr. Olds in Day Care, I learned that the children changed whom they initially were playing with and the different kinds of play they engaged in. The children also participated in-group play with certain peers inside the classroom. On the other hand, when they went outside to play, they engaged in play with children they normally wouldn't play with inside

the classroom. My observations revealed that there were 7 children that initiated play during the times when I observed them.

Parents

I informed the parents that I was observing the children in my classroom and asked them to complete a survey and return it to me. I gave 17 parents a survey and 10 parents completed and returned it to me on 12/5/01.

Here are the survey questions and my findings.

1. **Does the child talk about the other children in the Day Care with you? Yes or No**
   If yes, what does he/she say? Please respond using the exact wording as much as possible. 90% answered yes
   " Michael didn't listen and got time out."
   " Somebody hit me."
   " I play with Michael."
   " Liza made me jump and I fell."
   " John broke my rock doll."
   " I like my friends very much."
2. **Does the child talk about the other children in the Day Care with their siblings? Yes or No**
   If yes, what does he/she say? Please respond using the exact wording as much as possible. 30% answered yes

"Stephanie tied my laces."

" Michael doesn't push me."

3. **Does the child talk about the other children in the Day Care with other relatives? Yes or No**

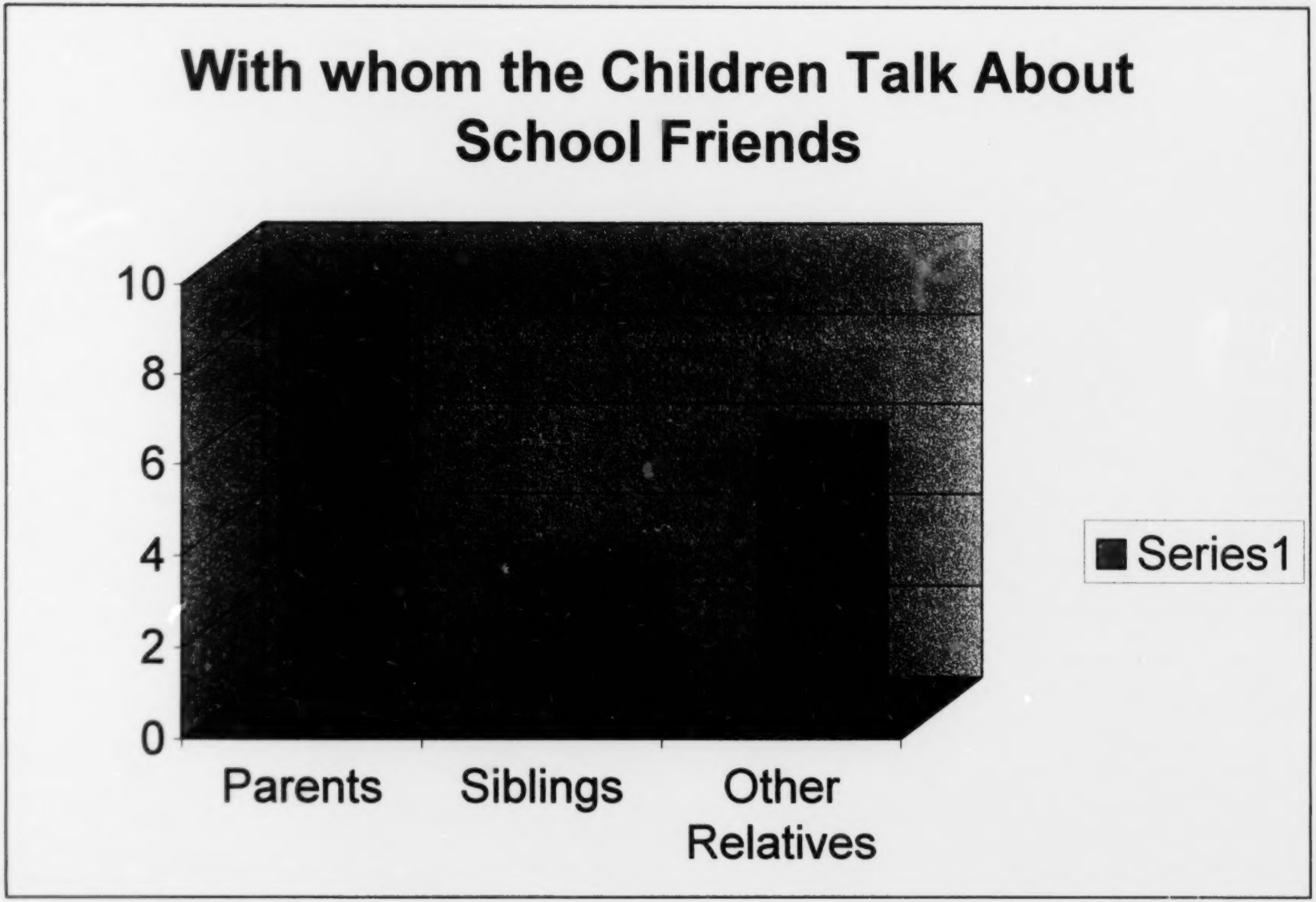
   If yes, what does he/she say? Please respond using the exact wording as much as possible. 60% answered yes

   "Don't run in school."

   "I like to paint."

Only one child did not speak about the other children in the Day Care to his/her parents, siblings and other relatives.

The surveys provided me with additional data that focused on the children's discussions about their peers outside of the Day Care. Forty percent of the parents responded in detail using the exact wording of the child. This information illustrated that the children spoke about their peers in school with their parents, sibling and/or other relatives. Sixty percent spoke about what their peers did in school, twenty percent spoke about what they did in school and another twenty percent spoke about other things regarding school.


With whom the Children Talk About School Friends
10
8
6
4
2
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Parents
Siblings
Other Relatives
Series1

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